DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 395 152 CE 071 575

TITLE	Communications. MAS-106. Waste Isolation Division (WID). Management and Supervisor Training (MAST) Program.
INSTITUTION	Westinghouse Electric Corp., Carlsbad, NM.
SPONS AGENCY	Department of Energy, Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	[96]
NOTE	51p.; For related modules, see CE 071 569-588.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Classroom Use - Instructional Materials (For Learner) (051)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adult Education; Behavioral Objectives; Employer Employee Relationship; Hazardous Materials; *Interpersonal Communication; Job Skills; Learning Modules; Listening; *Management Development; *Nonverbal Communication; Organizational Communication; Program Descriptions; Radiation; *Speech Communication; Staff Development; *Supervisory Training; Tests; Vocational Education; *Waste Disposal
IDENTIFIERS	*Radioactive Wastes

ABSTRACT

This module is part of a set of management and supervisor training (MAST) materials developed by the Department of Energy for the Waste Isolation Division. Its stated purpose is to enable trainees to communicate effectively in the workplace. The first section of the module is an introduction that includes a terminal objective and opening remarks intended to focus the trainees' attention on the subjects discussed in the module. Most other module sections begin with a list of enabling objectives. Many sections contain "critical incidents" or real-life occurrences at the Department of Energy's Waste Isolation Pilot Plant that relate to the section topic. Some illustrate effective management practices, and some illustrate ineffective ones. Each critical incident includes "lessons learned" information. Section topics include the following: methods of communicating; written communications; oral communications; nonverbal communication; and conduct of communications. A practice test follows. Answers and feedback for the test are provided. (YLB)

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ED 395 152

Waste Isolation Division
Management and Supervisor Training (MAST) Program

COMMUNICATIONS

MAS-106

APPROVAL

This module is approved for use.

_____ _____
Manager, Human Resources Development — Date

_____ _____
Manager, Human Resources — Date

TRAINEE INFORMATION

Trainee Name:_____

Trainee SS#:_____

Date Module Started:_____

Last Possible Date
For Completion of
Module Examination:_____

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

A	INTRODUCTION	2
B	METHODS OF COMMUNICATING	5
C	WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS	9
D	ORAL COMMUNICATIONS	15
E	NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION	36
F	CONDUCT OF COMMUNICATIONS	42
	PRACTICE TEST	45
	ANSWERS AND FEEDBACK FOR PRACTICE TEST	49

A. INTRODUCTION

Terminal Objective

Upon completion of this module, the trainee will be able to communicate effectively in the workplace.

Mastery of the terminal objective will be demonstrated by scoring 80% or higher on the module examination.

Communication and organizational success are directly related. Good communication can have a positive and mobilizing effect on employees. Poor communication can produce powerful negative consequences, such as the following:

1. Distortion of goals and objectives of the organization.

   Through anxiety, distrust, lack of support, rigidity, and other human resource issues created by poor communication, employees develop patterns of work in which they set their own agenda without regard for the organization's mission. They focus on tasks that are only partially related to the major goals of the organization. For example, employees may devote their work efforts to pet projects instead of working to accomplish organizational objectives.

2. Misuse of resources.

   Another consequence of poor communication is the misuse of an organization's resources. For instance, money may be budgeted for purchases that are only marginally effective, and employees may be assigned tasks that do not take full advantage of their abilities. Because of mistrust, a highly competent employee may be given routine duties and never allowed to make significant decisions and to advance in the organization.

3. Inefficiency in performance of duties.

   Because of communication problems, employees may perform their jobs inefficiently. An angry employee may decide to use more paper than is necessary, to take more time than is needed, or to route information along more complex channels. In each case, poor communication contributes to a less efficient use of resources and to inefficiency in the organization.

4. Inept performance.

   Poor communication can lead directly to doing a job badly, even to doing it wrong. Unskillful, incompetent, inept completion of tasks probably contributes to waste and loss as often as any other cause. Inept performance can lead to intolerable conditions and can be grounds for dismissal. Much inept performance could be eliminated through effective communication.

5. Lack of coordination.

   Accomplishment of organizational goals requires the coordination of activities. The degree to which activities are coordinated depends on the quality of communication. The lack of communication that results in poor coordination is a serious organizational loss in and of itself.

There can be little doubt that the consequences of poor communication are costly - in terms of productivity losses and detrimental effects on employees. You are in a position to prevent these types of consequences at the Waste Isolation Division (WID). As a supervisor or manager, you are in the "front line of communications." The ultimate responsibility for the quality of communication within your employee group rests with you.

Can the quality of communication in our division improve? The answer is an unequivocal "yes." Data to support this conclusion can be found in the Westinghouse 1990 Communications Survey. Excerpts from the survey are included below. Following each excerpt (in parentheses) is the percentage of WID employees who gave a favorable response to the question or statement.

To what extent do you feel you receive sufficient information about Westinghouse's business objectives? (39%)

I receive sufficient feedback on the quality of my work. (48%)

All in all, how would you rate the effectiveness of communications at your location? (39%)

Management here is making a greater effort now to improve communications. (38%)

Communications with employees are better now than they were a year or so ago. (30%)

How much trust and confidence would you say you have in the communications you receive (whether formally or informally) from top management at your location? (43%)

I get more information from official sources here, like workplace/staff meetings and our local publications, than I do from unofficial sources, like rumors and the grapevine. (35%)

To what extent do you feel you receive sufficient information about changes that are made that will directly affect you? (37%)

Top management does a good job of explaining the reasons behind important decisions that affect us. (28%)

Top management at this location encourages employees to report important information up-the-line, even if its "bad news." (44%)

How important to management at your location is having an open work atmosphere (so that people feel comfortable saying what they really feel)? (36%)

How would you rate the day-to-day feedback you receive on how well you are doing your job? (41%)

These statistics are not meant to leave you with the impression that we are doing a poor job communicating at WID. Overall, we do pretty well. They are included in this module as a challenge to all WID supervisors and managers to increase the quality of our communications. This module is devoted to providing you information to communicate effectively.

References: Organizational Communication by W. Pace and D. Faules, 1989
Westinghouse Communications Survey, 1990

B. METHODS OF COMMUNICATING

Enabling Objectives

Upon completion of this section, the trainee will be able to perform the following:

1. Identify the methods of communicating.
2. Identify most effective versus least effective methods of communicating.
3. Identify the criteria for selecting a communication method.
4. Identify why the use of multiple methods of communication is important.
5. Given an employee-manager scenario, evaluate the manager's effectiveness in selecting communication methods.

HOW INFORMATION IS COMMUNICATED

The methods by which information is communicated to employees may be grouped into three classes: (1) written, (2) oral, and (3) non-verbal. This section of the module will focus primarily on the "big picture" for written and oral methods. Each method will then be covered in detail later in this module.

When weighing various methods of communication, two issues deserve consideration: (1) which methods are viewed by supervisors and managers as most effective and (2) which methods are used most frequently.

Dale Level, an expert on business communication, surveyed supervisors and asked them to rate the effectiveness of different combinations of methods for different types of communication situations. Level's findings are shown in the table on the next page:

MOST EFFECTIVE VERSUS LEAST EFFECTIVE METHODS FOR COMMUNICATING WITH EMPLOYEES IN TEN DIFFERENT SITUATIONS

	Situation	Most Effective	Least Effec.
1.	Communicating information requiring immediate employee action	Oral followed by written	Written only
2.	Communicating information requiring future employee action	Written only	Oral only

3.	Communicating information of a general nature	Written only	Oral only
4.	Communicating a company directive or order	Oral followed by written	Oral only
5.	Communicating information on an important company policy change	Oral followed by written	Oral only
6.	Communicating with your immediate supervisor about work progress	Oral followed by written	Oral only
7.	Promoting a safety campaign	Oral followed by written	Oral only
8.	Commending an employee for noteworthy work	Oral followed by written	Written only
9.	Reprimanding an employee for work deficiency	Oral followed by written	Written only
10.	Settling a dispute among employees about a work problem	Oral only	Written only

Thomas Dahle, an authority on speech and communication, studied the effectiveness of five methods of downward communication from management to employees in business and industry. The results of his study are summarized in the table on the next page:

RELATIVE EFFECTIVENESS OF FIVE METHODS OF TRANSMITTING INFORMATION FROM MANAGEMENT TO EMPLOYEES IN BUSINESS AND INDUSTRIAL SETTINGS

Rank Order*	
1	Presenting information in both oral and written forms (oral and written)
2	Presenting information face-to-face to a group, using no written materials or visual aids (oral only)
3	Presenting written information to each member of the group with no supplementary oral or visual explanation (written only)
4	Posting the information on a bulletin board (bulletin board only)
5	Making no presentation of the information in either oral or written form (grapevine only)

*1 = Most effective, 5 = least effective

SELECTING A METHOD

When you are deciding which method of communication to use, consider the following six criteria:

1. Availability.

   The method must be accessible or obtainable before you can use it.

2. Cost.

   All other things being equal, the least costly method should be used. When nonroutine and urgent information sharing is necessary or desirable, more costly but faster methods probably should be used.

3. Impact.

   Take time to identify the method that will provide the greatest impact or impression.

4. Relevance.

   Choose the method that is most relevant to your purpose. If your purpose is to inform, a conversation followed by a memo can work well. If your purpose is to communicate complex details, a technical report could be the most relevant method.

SELECTING A METHOD (Continued)

5. Response.

   Consider whether a specific response to the information is desirable. In a training setting it may be desirable to use a method that allows and encourages trainees to react and ask questions. In such a case a face-to-face meeting probably would be the method chosen.

6. Skills.

   The chosen method should fit the abilities of the sender to use it and the abilities of the receiver to comprehend it. For example, a glossy brochure probably will not be used if the communicator does not feel capable of producing it. If an employee's education is limited, a complex manual of instructions probably wouldn't be effective.

Taking the time to consider these six criteria will enhance your effectiveness as a communicator. Additional help in choosing a method of communication is available from the Human Resources Specialist (Plant Communicator).

We offer one more point about choosing communication methods: Don't limit yourself to one method. Multi-method communications, when two or more communication methods (written, oral, and non-verbal) are combined, can be especially effective. When you make a presentation using visual aids, you are using multi-method communications. This can be very powerful. Why? Because different people have different learning styles. Some absorb information best when they hear it. Others are visual learners. Another group learns by "doing" it.

This information is valuable when you communicate with others. When you are presenting information to a group, use as many communication methods as practical. This allows your audience to absorb the information through the method that works best for them. For example, if you are teaching a group a new procedure, you might start by having them read the procedure. Next, you could explain the procedure. Last, you could have them "do" the procedure, demonstrating their knowledge.

CRITICAL INCIDENT
EFFECTIVE PERFORMANCE

Occurrence: A communications survey was planned for the WID. Employees learned about the survey well in advance through a variety of communication methods including TRU News, posters, and meetings with their supervisors and managers.

Impact: (1) The survey achieved a very high response rate. (2) Feedback from the survey helped to identify weak spots in WID's communications network. (3) The survey strengthened the feeling among employees that their opinions are valued because they saw the effort expended in conducting the survey. (4) Discontent arising over an isolated issue was identified earlier than it would have been had a successful survey not been conducted. New lines of communication were opened, thereby putting an end to the discontent.

Lessons learned: (1) Use a variety of communication methods to impart a message or to publicize an important event. (2) Plan your communications and allow plenty of time for your message to spread. (3) Employees will respond favorably to sincere, efficient efforts to gather their opinions.

References: Organizational Communication by W. Pace and D. Faules, 1989
Communication Effectiveness: Method and Situation by D. Level, The Journal of Business Communication, 10 (Fall 1972)
An Objective and Comparative Study of Five Methods of Transmitting Information from Management to Business and Industrial Employees by T. Dahle, Speech Monographs, 21 (March 1954)

C. WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS

Enabling Objectives

Upon completion of this section, the trainee will be able to perform the following:

1. Identify key elements of writing effectively.

2. Given an employee-manager scenario, evaluate the effectiveness of the manager's written communications.

How long has it been since you took a writing course? For many of us, it has been quite some time. Yet all WID supervisors and managers must write letters, memos, and reports. This can be an agonizing process. Expressing exactly what you want to say clearly, concisely, and correctly is a difficult task. In this module, we will review writing techniques that will help you perform this difficult task.

KEY ELEMENTS IN WRITING EFFECTIVELY

1. State your big idea first.

   How often have you read an entire document before you determined the purpose or main message? Let your readers know your purpose early in your letters and memos; don't keep them guessing. The lead paragraph of your memo, letter, or report should identify who, what, when, where, why, and how.

   Poor example:

   > Training is very important in the WID. We cannot be ready to meet our operational goals without continuing efforts in the area of training. As a supervisor or manager, you need to keep abreast of how your department is performing in terms of training. We have compiled the attached report to give you this information...

   Good example:

   > A training progress report is attached. Information contained in this report is current through the last working day of the month...

KEY ELEMENTS IN WRITING EFFECTIVELY (Continued)

2. K.I.S. (Keep it simple).

Avoid a complex style that will be difficult to read. Your fellow employees don't have time to decipher elaborate written messages. Don't use a twenty-dollar word when a ten cent word is available. If you have more than two points, number or list them with "bullets". Set off important statistics from the written text.

Poor example:

> Utilizing visual aids is a good technique; it can make your subject matter more comprehensible.

Good example:

> Using visual aids is a good practice; it can make your message easier to understand.

3. Write in a style that comes naturally.

Use words and phrases that readily come to mind. Learn from good writers, but never consciously imitate someone else's writing style. If you do, your writing probably will sound artificial.

Poor example:

> These are the times that try employees' souls.

Good example:

> This is a difficult time for employees.

4. Plan before you write.

This will keep you on track when you begin to write. It also will aid in creating a document that progresses in a logical sequence that is easy to read.

Poor example:

> ...and all employees should be informed. But before we discuss how to inform your employees, one more point should be made about our previous topic, planning. When planning to...

Good example:

> Now that we have discussed planning, we need to consider how to inform your employees.

KEY ELEMENTS IN WRITING EFFECTIVELY (Continued)

5. Do not overstate.

Exaggeration puts your readers on guard. Don't risk losing your readers' trust by indulging in overstatement; your credibility will suffer.

Poor example:

...but we met the deadline at great personal sacrifice and expense.

Good example:

The work was finished before the deadline.

6. Avoid the use of qualifiers.

Qualifiers include words such as "rather," "very," and "little." These words normally contribute little to what you are trying to express.

Poor example:

This is a very important task for the WIPP, but instructions on how to perform the task have been rather vague.

Good example:

This is an important task for the WIPP, but instructions on how to perform the task have been vague.

7. Use correct spelling.

Dictionaries and the spell checking capability of WID word processors virtually eliminate any excuse for misspelled words. If you are not sure how to spell a word, check it. Readers are drawn to misspellings like magnets.

KEY ELEMENTS IN WRITING EFFECTIVELY (Continued)

8. Be clear.

Strive for clarity. If you become bogged down in a sentence, try starting over. This often indicates that your sentence has become too complicated; the thought may need to be broken into two shorter sentences.

Poor example:

> Long sentences can be difficult to understand because, sometimes, by the time your reader finally gets to the end of the sentence, they have lost the original meaning of your sentence.

Good example:

> Long sentences can be difficult to understand. Your reader may miss your message.

9. Avoid injecting opinion without a good reason.

Help your readers reach the desired conclusion. Tell them what you want them to know.

Poor example:

> It is my sense that Vendor A is a lousy supplier.

Good example:

> These statistics show that most of our problems are caused by equipment supplied by Vendor A.

10. Send timely memos.

Don't expect receivers to read and respond to a memo the same day. Remember that the more complex an issue is, the more time the recipient will need to consider the reply.

Poor example:

> Please provide your response to this memo by tomorrow.

Good example:

> Please provide your response to this memo by Wednesday of next week (7/17).

KEY ELEMENTS IN WRITING EFFECTIVELY (Continued)

11. Do not use acronyms unless you are certain that the acronym will be understood.

It is a good practice to write out the term in full the first time you use it in your document. After that, using the acronym is appropriate.

Poor example:

> The MAST program was enacted in WID during 1991. MAST is a comprehensive...

Good example:

> The Management and Supervisor and Training (MAST) program was enacted in Waste Isolation Division (WID) during 1991. MAST is a comprehensive...

12. Help your readers understand and remember.

Lace abstract arguments with graphic illustrations, analogies, applicable quotations, and concrete details.

Poor example:

> Equipment supplied by Vendor A has caused many problems at the WIPP. Some of these problems have been very costly. Therefore...

Good example:

> Equipment supplied by Vendor A has caused many costly problems at the WIPP. For example, when the equipment in Building 14 failed...

13. Revise and rewrite.

Revising is part of writing. Few of us are skilled enough to produce a finished piece on the first draft. William Strunk, Jr. and E. B. White, authorities on writing style, offer these words of wisdom:

> Remember, it is no sign of weakness or defeat that your manuscript ends up in need of major surgery. This is a common occurrence in all writing, and among the best writers.

Even great writers such as Ernest Hemingway had to revise and rewrite:

Interviewer: How much rewriting do you do?

Hemingway: It depends. I rewrote the ending of Farewell to Arms, the last page of it, thirty-nine times before I was satisfied.

Interviewer: Was there some technical problem there? What was it that had stumped you?

Hemingway: Getting the words right.

These practices will provide basic skills for effective writing and help you avoid most common writing errors.

CRITICAL INCIDENT
INEFFECTIVE PERFORMANCE

Occurrence: A manager sent a letter to a WID customer. It contained many grammatical and typographical errors. These errors would have been easily eliminated through careful proofreading.

Impact: (1) The customer was offended by the letter. The letter gave the customer a poor impression of the WID, causing the customer to wonder about the competence of WID personnel. (2) The manager's letter sent a message to employees that less than a total quality effort is acceptable.

Lessons learned: (1) Take the time to carefully proofread your written documents. It is a good practice to have someone else in your department give important documents a second proofreading before they are sent out. (2) Letters and memos often carry heavy symbolic meaning. They are more than just a piece of paper. These written documents tangibly represent you and your department. A poorly written document produces images of a poorly run operation. (3) The manager or supervisor accepts the responsibility for certifying that a document is correct by signing it. Sign documents; do not "autograph" them.

References: The Elements of Style by W. Strunk and E. White, 1979
Writing with Style: Conversations on the Art of Writing by J. Trimble, 1975

D. ORAL COMMUNICATIONS

Enabling Objectives

Upon completion of this section, the trainee will be able to perform the following:

1. Identify key elements in speaking to groups.
2. Identify key factors influencing audience reactions.
3. Identify steps to control oral presentations.
4. Identify benefits associated with effective listening.
5. Identify empathetic listening.
6. Identify key elements for effective listening.
7. Identify listening practices to avoid.
8. Identify causes of ineffective meetings.
9. Identify effective meeting practices.
10. Identify benefits of using feedback.
11. Identify key elements for giving constructive feedback.
12. Identify key elements for giving positive feedback.
13. Given an employee-manager scenario, evaluate the manager's effectiveness in communicating orally.

This section will cover the broad topic of oral communications, including speaking, listening, meetings, and feedback.

SPEAKING TO GROUPS

Many adult Americans view the prospect of speaking in public quite literally as a fate worse than death. Several years ago, in a now famous study, a market research organization conducted a poll on the question "What do you fear most?" As you might expect, "heights" was high on the list, along with "financial problems," "flying," "serious illness," and "death." But topping the list - the number one fear - was "speaking before a group."

We won't entirely alleviate this fear with this module. Even if we could, that might not be a good idea. A little nervousness is helpful, causing us to take our presentation seriously and giving us energy to perform. Our focus in this module will be to give you time-proven practices you can follow to increase your effectiveness when making presentations.

ORAL PRESENTATIONS

When you speak to a group, follow six steps to control the presentation and build your self-confidence: (1) know the subject, (2) determine the purpose, (3) identify the audience, (4) plan the presentation, (5) practice the delivery, and (6) follow good practices during the presentation.

1. Know the subject.

   A major contributor to speaker anxiety or stage fright is the lack of adequate examination of the subject. Analyze your subject comprehensively in preparation for a presentation. This will give you self-confidence and credibility.

2. Determine the purpose.

   Your presentation must have a purpose, an objective, a goal; otherwise you may ramble. Ask yourself what you want to accomplish through your presentation. Then determine the major points you want to convey; this will provide you direction and focus.

3. Identify the audience.

   This step is more complicated than simply naming who will be in your audience. Misperceiving your audience may severely jeopardize your presentation. Your audience includes an assortment of knowledge, attitudes, professional needs, and experience. This assortment forms mental filters, which can bar the reception of your argument or plan. Identifying the key characteristics of your audience can reveal the attitudes or professional needs that your presentation must satisfy. For example, if you determine that your audience already favors a particular plan, but you are recommending another, you will need to offer persuasive arguments counter to the favored plan.

4. Plan the presentation.

   After you analyze the subject, purpose, and audience thoroughly, consider the format of your presentation. For example, presenting a highly technical topic to a general audience will require a different format, vocabulary, and style than presenting the same topic to a technically oriented audience.

Another planning consideration is content. Overloading your presentation with numbers, facts, and testimony beyond what is crucial overwhelms listeners and causes them to tune you out. Listener retention rates (an individual's ability to remember) begin a rapid decline about 10 minutes after a presentation. Forty-eight hours after a presentation only 25 percent is remembered. Poor listening skills explain some of this lack of retention. Poorly organized presentations are another cause of retention loss. Avoid meandering through details that obscure your primary points.

Develop an outline for your presentation. Make sure the outline includes key points that you will make during your presentation. Then you can use your outline as a guide from which to speak.

One final point will help you plan for presentations. Anticipate and prepare answers for audience questions. This will help you in two ways: (1) It will enable you to do a better job answering questions and (2) it will give your confidence a boost.

5. Practice the delivery.

After you define your purpose, research the topic, identify the audience, and plan the presentation, complete your preparation by rehearsing. This is an invaluable way to prove your command of the material, lessen your nervousness, and test your readiness. The key is to practice until you get it right.

You can improve your delivery and upgrade your confidence by: (1) practicing in the room where you will speak with the equipment you will use and (2) conducting a dry run of your presentation in front of a small group. During the dry run, have a coworker ask tough questions. This will help you feel more comfortable when you give your presentation.

6. Follow good practices during the presentation.

- Dress professionally. When in doubt, err on the conservative side and overdress rather than underdress. Why? Because your style of dress affects how audiences receive you. Your choice of clothing can enhance your image as a presenter, making your message stronger. You should dress well, but your clothing should not call attention to itself.

6. Follow good practices during the presentation (continued)

- Don't view a little nervousness as a bad sign - it's not. If you practiced adequately, your nervousness will disappear as you get into the flow of your presentation.
- Introduce yourself and your topic. Don't assume everyone knows you and the purpose of your presentation.
- "Break the ice" with humor or an anecdote related to your topic. This will help you to relax and establish rapport with your audience.
- Establish your purpose early in the presentation. Make it clear what you are there to accomplish.
- Satisfy the WIIFM (What's In It For Me?) syndrome of your audience. Covering this early in your presentation can help you overcome the "so what" or "who cares" attitude some audience members will have.
- Involve your audience quickly in your presentation. You can do this by using questions - ask your audience questions and encourage them to ask you questions.
- Establish eye contact. Don't stare at your outline or focus on one or two persons; slowly cover the whole room with your eye contact.
- Speak to the audience. A common error made by speakers is to talk to a blackboard, flipchart, or screen. This causes speakers to be difficult to hear and audiences to lose interest.
- Eliminate visual distractions when you are speaking. Put down the pointer when you're finished pointing out items. The audience will begin to focus on the pointer rather than on what you are saying. Turn off the overhead projector when you are finished with a slide. Don't play with change in your pockets.
- "Work" the audience. If you see someone with their arms crossed, frowning, or shaking their head, draw them in. Ask questions they can answer or draw upon their experience to confirm points in your presentation.
- For large audiences, repeat questions so that everyone can hear what was asked.
- Pause before answering a question. Pauses show respect for both the questioner and for the question itself. Pauses also give you time to think before you answer.

6. Follow good practices during the presentation (continued)

- Use signal words and phrases to keep the audience tuned in: "The real issue is ..."; "What's important here..."; "This is critical..."
- If a major disruption occurs, stop speaking. If you try to compete with major disruptions, you'll lose.
- Move around. This helps keep the audience's attention focused. Be wary of lecterns. Your presentations will have more impact if you can get out from behind a lectern and interact with your listeners.
- If someone asks a question you cannot answer, don't try to "fake it." Tell them you don't know the answer but that you will get back to them. And be sure to do just that.
- At the end of your presentation, summarize your main points. Summarizing helps increase the amount of your presentation the audience will retain. After summarizing, open the floor to questions.

SUMMARY

Speaking to groups and making presentations is an important part of your job as a WID supervisor or manager. If you are like many of us, this task can make you nervous, but this nervousness can be channeled into a positive force. Make your "butterflies" fly in formation by following the six practices discussed in this module: (1) know your subject, (2) determine your purpose, (3) identify your audience, (4) plan your presentation, (5) practice your delivery, and (6) follow good practices during the presentation.

CRITICAL INCIDENT
INEFFECTIVE PERFORMANCE

Occurrence: A manager was asked in advance to brief a WID customer about how his department was contributing to facility readiness. He forgot about the presentation until an hour before the briefing and hurriedly drafted rough notes for the presentation. The presentation was disorganized and there were no visual aids to guide the audience through key points.

Impact: The customer was dissatisfied.

Lessons learned: (1) Preparing for a presentation allows one to provide the audience useful information and to leave a favorable impression. (2) Communications are part of the Total Quality effort and an important part of your job as a supervisor or manager.

References: A Short Guide to Oral Presentations by M. Rapisarda, 1985
Get to the Point - How to Say What You Mean and Get What You Want by K. Berg, A. Gilman, and E. Stevenson, 1989

LISTENING

> A certain supervisor had trouble communicating with his people. Finally, in desperation, he pleaded, "Don't listen to what I say. Listen to what I mean." - Unknown

Listening is a skill that has a dramatic impact on your effectiveness as a supervisor or manager. An often mentioned attribute of respected bosses is that they "really listen to me." Supervisors and managers who listen to their employees can build rapport, swiftly clear up misunderstandings, and build esteem in both themselves and others.

As an effective listener, you set in motion a positive, mutually rewarding process by showing interest in your employees and in what they are saying. Listening encourages honesty, understanding, and a feeling of security in employees. When employees know they are talking to a listener instead of a boss who sits in judgment, they openly suggest ideas and share feelings. Listening is a key way to gather information.

Listening encourages employees to feel self-confident. When your employees share a problem with you, do you feel that it is your responsibility to solve it? If so, you are probably wasting your energy. A request for listening is usually not a request for advice. Your main task is to listen with understanding, nonjudgmentally. Maintaining an open, available stance while seeking information and showing concern is an effective, assertive style of communicating. Active listening gives the employee a chance to talk through a problem while experiencing emotional release. Given the opportunity to solve their own problems, employees feel more confident in their abilities.

Employees who are listened to are better able to cope with on-the-job stresses. Thus, listening is a potent force for reducing tension. Listening tells the employee, "Your opinions are legitimate." Conversely, employees who are not listened to get the message that their opinions are not important. Holding tensions in does not get rid of them. They eventually erupt in negative form such as missing deadlines, being late for work, or not putting in extra effort.

Madelyn Burley-Allen, an expert on listening, has identified multiple levels of listening. Empathetic listening is the highest level of listening efficiency. At this level, listeners refrain from evaluating the speaker's words and place themselves in the other's position, attempting to see things from his or her point of view. Some characteristics of this level include taking in main ideas; paying attention to the speaker's total communication (including body language); being empathetic to the speaker's feelings and thoughts; and suspending one's own thoughts and feelings to give attention solely to listening. Empathetic listening requires an "I'm-OK-You're-OK" attitude. Empathetic listening also requires that the listener show both verbally and nonverbally that he or she is truly receiving the message.

Let's look at some examples Burley-Allen uses to illustrate the differences between empathetic and nonempathetic listening. The first example illustrates nonempathetic listening:

Gary: "I just don't know what I'm going to do about my boss. He's always picking on me for little things I do wrong."

Kent: "You should talk to him about why you're upset."

Gary: "Yeah, but I couldn't do that. He'd make life miserable for me."

Kent: "Well, you ought to ignore him and not let him bother you."

Gary: "Yeah, but then I'd be letting him get away with his lousy behavior and he'd never change."

Kent: "Well...you should quit and get another job."

Gary: "Yeah, but I need the money, and the way the job market is these days, I probably wouldn't be able to find another job for months."

Kent: (by this time completely exasperated): "Why don't you take out a gun and shoot him?!"

Notice that each time Kent came up with a solution, Gary had a rebuttal. Instead of listening to what Kent was suggesting, Gary focused on what would not work. Instead of being open to Kent's suggestions, Gary used his listening time to think of reasons why he couldn't use them. The listening pattern exhibited by Gary and Kent is not productive for either person. The problem doesn't get resolved, and the person providing the solutions feels discouraged. Now let's see what happens when Kent uses empathetic listening:

Gary: "I just don't know what I'm going to do about my boss. He's always picking on me for little things I do wrong."

Kent: "Sounds like you don't know how to handle your boss when he points out things you do that he doesn't like."

Gary: "Yeah, and he does it a lot. I don't want to tell him about it because it might make him mad. Then he'd probably make life miserable for me."

Kent: "Hmmm. Seems like your caught in a double bind. On the one hand, you want to tell your boss what you don't like. On the other hand, you don't want to tell him because he might get upset with you."

Gary: "Yeah, that's exactly how I feel."

Kent: "It's a tough spot to be in. What kind of choices do you have? Let's talk about them."

Notice that Kent's summarizing of what Gary said led to agreement on what was happening, in contrast to the preceding example where Gary and Kent disagreed. It also helped Gary see more clearly what was going on between him and his boss. By being an effective listener, Kent stayed out of the "Yes, but" trap. Kent and Gary have not solved Gary's problem, but at least they have made progress toward a solution.

Now that we have discussed characteristics of effective listening, let's cover some specific do's and don't's.

KEY ELEMENTS FOR EFFECTIVE LISTENING

1. Stop talking!

   You cannot listen if you are talking.

2. Hold your questions until you have listened empathetically.

   Sometimes an empathetic response is necessary two or three times before the talker's emotional level has lessened to the point where he or she can think objectively. By helping the talker bring his or her emotional level down, the listener helps the talker become logical and analytical.

3. Find areas of common interest.

   If you adopt a positive attitude toward topics, you will usually find something in any talk that will broaden your knowledge. Look for elements of personal value. Ask yourself: What can I gain from this? What's in it for me? How does this relate to what I already know?

4. Take the initiative.

   Find out what the speaker knows. Look at the speaker and concentrate on what he or she says. Go all the way in making the communication two-way. If necessary, ignore the speaker's appearance and personality to reach for the message. Stimulate the talker by your attentiveness and expressions of interest, including noncommittal acknowledgments such as "Oh, I see," "How about that," "Mm-hmm," "Interesting," "Really," "You did," etcetera.

5. Work at listening.

   Efficient listening takes energy. Practice will make it easier. Listen actively and energetically.

6. Focus your attention on ideas.

   Listen for the speaker's central idea. Pick out the ideas as they are stated, sorting facts from assumptions, ideas from examples, and evidence from opinion.

KEY ELEMENTS FOR EFFECTIVE LISTENING (Continued)

7. Hold your rebuttal.

   Don't let emotions disrupt your listening. Learn to recognize words that negatively impact your listening. Quickly analyze why these words provoke you, then resume listening, withholding any evaluation until you fully comprehend the point the speaker is making.

8. Keep an open mind.

   Quickly disagreeing with and dismissing a speaker can create a psychological blind spot. Resist this impulse. Continue to give the speaker your attention and try to understand the speaker's point of view. Instead of judging what the person says, clarify meaning by restating in your own words what you think was said.

9. Capitalize on the speed of thought by summarizing.

   The core of effective listening is the development of the utmost concentration. Most individuals talk at only 150 words per minute. We think about three times faster. That extra time can be used to concentrate on what is said. Summarize what the speaker said. Decide how well the speaker is supporting his(her) points and how you would have supported them. Mentally review, after each point is covered, the progress of the theme. Draw contrasts and comparisons, and identify the speaker's use of evidence.

10. Exercise your listening skills regularly.

    Get experience and practice by listening to difficult or unfamiliar material that challenges your mental capacities. Every meeting should present many opportunities for practice.

11. Analyze what is being said nonverbally.

    Be sensitive to the feelings of the speaker. Listen between the lines for hidden meanings. What is the person saying nonverbally?

12. Evaluate the content of the message, not mannerisms or appearances.

    The message is more important than the speaker's appearance. Don't let a poor voice, personality, or looks get in the way of the message.

13. Stop talking!

    This is first and last, because all other guides depend on it. You cannot listen effectively while you are talking.

PRACTICES TO AVOID

1. Pseudo-listening.

   We are all guilty of putting on a polite facade while our mind wanders. If it is not a good time for you to listen, tell the speaker. Reschedule the conversation for a time when you can effectively listen.

2. Stage-hogging.

   Some people don't listen because they are always talking. Our culture values good talkers. But researchers have found that the most powerful members of groups are superior listeners. They ask more questions and listen more effectively than other group members.

3. Selective listening.

   Often we hear only parts of a message. If information makes us uncomfortable or is too difficult, we are tempted to stop listening. Sometimes we find ourselves predicting what a meeting is about. Then we decide not to listen since we think we already know what will be said.

4. Defensive listening.

   You may have employees who listen carefully, but only for bits and pieces they can use in their rebuttal. Because they are busy composing their next statement when they should be listening, they miss important messages. Serve as a good listening role model for your employees.

5. Trying to solve employees' problems or thinking for them.

   Employees feel more self-confident when they can solve their own problems. Although giving advice can make you feel needed and important, it can inhibit an employee's personal and professional development.

SUMMARY

Following the do's and don't's described here will positively impact your interactions and relationships with others - at work and elsewhere. Put listening techniques to work today: (1) listen empathetically; (2) listen nonjudgmentally; (3) don't interrupt speakers; and (5) reschedule conversations when you are not able to effectively listen.

References: Managing Assertively: How to Improve Your People Skills by M. Burley-Allen, 1983.
Effective Listening: Key to Your Success by L. Steil, L. Barker, and K. Watson, 1983.
Human Relations at Work by K. Davis, 1978.
Practical Supervision, Number 61, May 1987.

CONDUCTING EFFECTIVE MEETINGS

Chairing and attending meetings is an important part of our supervisor's and manager's jobs. When carefully planned and executed, meetings are an efficient way of disseminating information, exchanging ideas, problem-solving, and arriving at decisions.

Conversely, ineffective meetings have been referred to as "organized ways of sharing ignorance." One cause of ineffective meetings is too much unproductive talking by participants. A second reason is lack of adequate planning by the chairperson. A third reason is failure to control friction stemming from personality clashes, or differing points of view. Another reason is confusion about terminology, key words, and concepts. A final cause of ineffective meetings is lack of training in how to conduct effective meetings.

Conducting an effective meeting takes preparation. The time you spend preparing will be obvious to participants. While preparing to conduct a meeting, review and follow the guidelines listed below.

EFFECTIVE MEETING PRACTICES

1. Call meetings only when necessary.

   Meetings usually should be avoided when another method of communication can be used. Why? Because meetings are an expensive use of employee time. It is usually best NOT to call a meeting when:

   - you have to act immediately
   - reactions are not needed - or wanted
   - the problem is between individuals

   DO consider calling a meeting when:

   - you want to get subordinates' reactions and stimulate two-way communication
   - you need more facts, expert opinions, etcetera
   - you need creative new ideas, approaches, and solutions
   - you must depend on others to carry out decisions
   - you want to build teamwork

2. Determine the results you want from the meeting.

   Knowing your purpose will help you plan the meeting. You have to know what you want before you can get it.

EFFECTIVE MEETING PRACTICES (Continued)

3. Invite only persons who are needed.

   The most efficient meeting size is five people. If more than 13 people attend, you have a conference rather than a meeting; few decisions are made at a conference.

4. Arrange the location.

   If possible, choose a room in which the illumination and temperature can be regulated. The size of the table and number of chairs should be appropriate for the number attending. Only those with a place at the table will be considered full participants.

5. Allow participants to select the best time.

   Contact people in person or by telephone and find out when they can meet. People resent meetings that disrupt their schedule. Your meeting attendance will improve when you allow participants to select the best time.

6. Write and distribute the agenda.

   The agenda is a list of things to be considered or covered during the meeting. Be sure to include the meeting time, location, and topics to be covered. Get your agenda out to participants as early as possible.

7. Notify participants who will need to make presentations or provide specific input at the meeting.

   Give key participants the opportunity to research available background information before the meeting.

8. Start on time.

   Don't recap for latecomers. This rewards and reinforces their behavior (lateness) and penalizes punctual participants.

9. Share the responsibility for starting out right.

   Make sure the participants understand the purpose and objectives of the meeting. Being clear about this up front with participants will help keep everyone focused.

EFFECTIVE MEETING PRACTICES (Continued)

10. Use a variety of skills to maximize meeting effectiveness and to facilitate decision-making:

    - o define the problem
    - o clarify
    - o keep discussion constructive
    - o summarize
    - o test consequences of emerging decisions
    - o make decisions

12. Stick to your agenda.

    Referring to the agenda and elapsed time will reinforce your commitment to stay on track.

13. Keep an open, accepting attitude.

    A positive meeting climate encourages people to share ideas. It is especially important not to embarrass participants. Don't become defensive when others express ideas that conflict with yours.

14. Manage participation.

    Direct the talkative; draw out the quiet. It's normal for the participants to be aware of each person's rank or status. Junior members may be reluctant to speak out. Draw upon their knowledge and experience by using questioning.

15. Diagnose and treat the "hidden agendas."

    People sometimes have hidden agendas that can sabotage a meeting. This happens when someone opposes your ideas because they have a plan known only to them. Instead of being open about their plan, they keep it hidden and try to undermine your plan. Try to bring hidden agendas into the open.

16. Keep the reins in your hands.

    You determine the direction of the meeting by how you respond to participant comments. Keeping control also may require that you politely interrupt misguided discussions.

17. Hold short meetings.

    Participants are much more likely to return to meet with you when you respect the value of their time and use it sparingly.

EFFECTIVE MEETING PRACTICES (Continued)

18. Tie up loose ends.

    Sometimes it's impossible to cover every item on the agenda. Avoid making hasty decisions before the meeting ends. Instead, table unresolved issues until the next meeting.

19. Avoid "dumping" issues/actions on unrepresented parties.

    It's not "open season" on someone just because they are not present at a meeting.

20. Clarify follow-up assignments.

    To help guarantee that action is taken on decisions, it's important to know:

    - WHO is responsible for carrying out the decision
    - WHAT is to be done
    - HOW action is to be carried out
    - WHEN the work should be completed

21. Summarize decisions.

    A quick recap of decisions made and actions to be taken can be helpful. This refreshes the memories of participants and prevents confusion later. This also helps people leave with a sense of accomplishment. As necessary, follow up with written meeting minutes.

22. Plan the next meeting (when appropriate).

    To get a head start on the next meeting, plan now.

    - Set the date
    - Select the place.
    - Develop a preliminary agenda.

23. End on a positive note.

    Meetings that end in an upbeat fashion are more likely to result in successful follow-up action. Try to avoid sending participants away demotivated or overly stressed.

EFFECTIVE MEETING PRACTICES (Continued)

24. Evaluate the success of the meeting.

Make mental notes to help when planning future meetings. Is a better time of day preferable? Were certain people absent because of the date or location? Were there too many interruptions because participants came late, left early, or received telephone messages during the meeting? Was the meeting too long?

SUMMARY

Two keys for successful meetings are (1) planning before the meeting and (2) directing during the meeting. You must do both well to be a highly effective meeting chairperson.

CRITICAL INCIDENT
INEFFECTIVE PERFORMANCE

Occurrence: Notice of a meeting was received by participants the day of the meeting. There was no agenda provided prior to or during the meeting, so participants began discussing unrelated issues. At the close of the meeting, no assignments were made and no conclusions were reached.

Impact: (1) Valuable employee time was wasted. (2) No progress was made in resolving the issues about which the meeting was planned. (3) The meeting chairperson irritated meeting participants with this poor use of their time.

Lessons learned: (1) Provide meeting participants with advance written notice of meetings. (2) Provide participants with an agenda before the meeting when possible; this allows them to come to the meeting prepared. (3) Establish and adhere to priority items on a meeting agenda.

References: Baylor Leadership Bulletin, Numbers 12 and 13, March 1990
Practical Supervision, Number 47, March 1986
Communications in the Business Organization by W. Scholz, 1962
How to Have Successful Meetings, Channing L. Bete Company, 1991

FEEDBACK

Before we can discuss how to use feedback, we must understand what it is. Feedback is the return of information about the result of a process. The process we are concerned about is human behavior. People give us feedback on our behavior. We give feedback to others about their behavior. Each of us gives and receives feedback every day.

Knowing how to give feedback is one of the basics of being an effective supervisor or manager. Yet few of us have had a course on feedback. Most of us have had at least one boss who provided feedback effectively. And chances are that this boss ranks among our list of best bosses. This section is devoted to giving you information to help you become one of your employees' "best bosses" in terms of using feedback - a key dimension by which employees judge their supervisors and managers.

We begin our discussion with constructive feedback. Some managers and supervisors hesitate to give constructive feedback because they associate it with harsh criticism they have received in the past. But passive supervisors and managers do their employees a disservice by failing to call attention to work-related problems. Employees need to know when you are displeased about their work so that they can do something to correct the problem.

Supervisors and managers who understand the value of constructive feedback know that it benefits them as well as their employees. Addressing mistakes or substandard work in a nonjudgmental, problem-solving manner benefits employees by giving them a chance to improve. Supervisors and managers benefit because errors and poor performance are kept at a minimum. Their stress level is lower because they are not "gunnysacking" or internalizing their concerns. When they notice problems, they assertively bring them out in the open without trampling on the feelings of their employees.

Now let's talk about some guidelines to follow when giving constructive feedback.

KEY ELEMENTS IN GIVING CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK

1. Be a witness, not a judge.

   In other words, concentrate on describing instead of judging. Focus on what would be useful in the future (lessons learned) - not on blaming.

2. Get the facts before giving feedback.

   Weigh any mitigating circumstances.

KEY ELEMENTS IN GIVING CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK (Continued)

3. Provide feedback face-to-face, in private.

   This allows employees to save face and to concentrate on what you are saying. Employees may react emotionally if you give them feedback at the wrong time or place.

4. Discuss the problem while the incident is fresh in your mind.

   The longer you wait, the more likely you are to fall into the trap of inaction. Furthermore, your recollection of the events may become fuzzy as time passes. You also lose impact by waiting; the connection between the incident and your feedback decreases with time. Research has shown that feedback given as soon as appropriate after observation is more specific, more concrete, and generally more accurate.

5. Stay with the immediate problem.

   Don't "empty your gunnysack," bringing up past incidents or other problems. This can overwhelm and devastate employees. Be aware of how much feedback your employees can handle at one time.

6. Don't begin by saying how terrible the problem is:

   "There's something terrible happening here. It's really getting me mad. What I mean is..." Starting like this puts employees on the defensive. Sometimes it sends employees into a state of mental panic thinking, "Oh no! What have I done now?" If you need a preface, just say something like, "I've noticed..."

7. Don't label people.

   If someone calls us "dishonest," it sounds quite different from their saying we acted "dishonestly" in a given situation. Focus feedback on observations rather than on inferences. Observations are those things that could be seen or heard by anyone, but inferences are your own interpretations or conclusions about what went on. Observations are always valid, but inferences and personal interpretations often are not.

8. Avoid generalizations.

   Be specific: "You have been absent three Fridays"; "You have missed two deadlines."

9. Be objective:

   "Your manner resulted in two employees complaining about the way you treated them," not "You've been extremely rude."

KEY ELEMENTS IN GIVING CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK (Continued)

10. Use words that relate to specific actions:

    "He was silent through the whole meeting". Avoid words that label characteristics: "He sulked and pouted through the whole meeting."

11. Manage your nonverbal behavior.

    Look straight at your listener, maintaining eye contact at least one-half of the time. Use positive but sincere facial expressions such as smiling and looking interested. Use positive movement by leaning forward and nodding your head in agreement. Keep your body relaxed, but keep an upright posture. This sends the message that your feedback is important, but that you want to keep the atmosphere informal.

12. Listen empathetically.

    Be attentive; use acknowledging words: "I see," "Hmm," "Uh-huh." People prefer vocal encouragement to silence. Summarize and clarify to avoid misunderstandings.

13. Focus feedback on sharing of ideas and information; don't give advice unless an employee specifically requests it.

    Be ready to help your employee, but don't tell the employee what to do. Instead, help the employee to explore alternatives.

Before we leave the topic of feedback, we need to talk about positive feedback. Many people are uncomfortable receiving positive feedback and compliments. This could be for many reasons, including messages they heard while growing up. The result is that some people feel that it is immodest to acknowledge a compliment. This does <u>not</u> mean that supervisors and managers should avoid giving positive feedback. It simply means one must learn the right way to give positive feedback. Here are a few tips that will help:

1. Be sure to include some positive feedback in your quarterly objective review meetings with employees.

2. Recognize and reward each employee according to his or her performance.

   Timing is significant: It is best to recognize and reward promptly to carry the most impact.

KEY ELEMENTS IN GIVING POSITIVE FEEDBACK (Continued)

3. Use praise carefully.

If misapplied, praise can backfire by leaving employees embarrassed, bewildered, defensive, etcetera. Use a clear, specific description of the employee's behavior or the result of that behavior. Then tell the employee how you feel or what you value about his or her behavior. Last, state how the employee's behavior has had a positive effect. An example will help to clarify this approach to giving praise: "When you worked through lunch to finish that procedure, I felt thankful because that allowed us to meet our deadline." This method stresses what you value and provides specific, descriptive feedback that the employee can relate to.

SUMMARY

Feedback is a potent tool for a supervisor or manager. Used correctly, it can enhance the effectiveness, self-esteem, and morale of your employees. In this module, we have explored the most important aspects of using feedback. More information is available; see the Professional Development Trainer or the Manager, Human Resources Development, if you are interested.

CRITICAL INCIDENT
INEFFECTIVE PERFORMANCE

Occurrence: A supervisor did not give feedback to an employee about the quality of the employee's performance. The employee became dissatisfied because of the supervisor's failure to communicate good performance or to provide suggestions for improvement. As a result, the employee sought and obtained a transfer to another department.

Impact: The supervisor lost a valuable employee.

Lessons learned: (1) Employees want feedback regarding their job performance. (2) Recognition of good work performance and positive suggestions for improvement build employee confidence and job satisfaction. (3) Guiding an employee through a specific work plan with proper feedback helps ensure that the work is accomplished as intended.

References: Managing Assertively: How to Improve Your People Skills by M. Burley-Allen, 1983
The Dynamics of Human Communication: A Laboratory Approach by G. Myers and M. Myers, 1973

E. NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Enabling Objectives

Upon completion of this section, the trainee will be able to:

1. Identify nonverbal behaviors.
2. Identify how nonverbal behaviors support verbal behaviors.
3. Identify the effects of physical appearance and dress on communication.
4. Identify the effects of physical behavior on communication.
5. Identify the effects of the face and eyes on communication.
6. Identify difficulties caused by overusing or misusing visual aids.
7. Identify questions to determine the usefulness of a visual aid.
8. Identify guidelines for using visual aids effectively.
9. Given an employee-manager scenario, evaluate the manager's awareness of nonverbal communication.

The contribution of nonverbal behavior to the processes of communication is often overlooked. This is unfortunate because our nonverbal behavior influences the effectiveness and well-being of all our relationships.

The importance of nonverbal communication would be undeniable if sheer quantity were the only measure. Some astounding estimates have been made concerning the amount of nonverbal communication taking place. It has been estimated that the average person actually speaks words for a total of only 10 to 11 minutes daily - the standard spoken sentence taking only 2.5 seconds. In a normal two-person conversation, the verbal components carry less than 35 percent of the meaning of the situation.

People who have a greater awareness of nonverbal communication can more accurately communicate their feelings and be more successful in their relationships. They also will be more successful at organizing, persuading, and leading others. In contrast, there are others who are constantly misunderstood; their style discourages friendships and causes them to live lonely and isolated lives. Most of us can benefit considerably from a greater awareness of nonverbal communication. Our nonverbal style affects our interactions with others and has a strong impact on our life.

The term "nonverbal" is commonly used to describe all communication beyond the limits of spoken or written words. Nonverbal behavior refers to actions such as facial expressions, gestures, postures, positions, and various movements of the body.

In considering nonverbal communication, one must remember that it cannot be studied in isolation from the total communication process. Verbal and nonverbal communication should be treated as a total and inseparable unit. Many nonverbal events and behaviors are interpreted through verbal symbols.

What are some of the ways in which verbal and nonverbal systems interrelate? How do nonverbal behaviors support verbal behaviors?

1. Repeating.

   Nonverbal communication can simply repeat what was said verbally. For instance, if you told a person he had to go west to get to Carlsbad and then pointed in the proper direction, this would be considered repetition. When you agree with a person, notice that you tend to nod your head in agreement just before saying, "I think maybe you are right." The verbal and nonverbal behaviors tend to repeat or confirm each other.

2. Contradicting.

   Nonverbal behavior can contradict verbal behavior. A classic example is the supervisor who yells to his employee in an angry voice, "Of course I want you to come to me with problems!" Or the employee who is about to make an oral presentation, whose hands and knees tremble, and who not so confidently states, "I'm not nervous." When we receive contradictory messages on the verbal and nonverbal level, we are more likely to trust and believe in the nonverbal message. This is because nonverbal signals are more spontaneous, harder to fake, and less apt to be manipulated.

3. Substituting.

   Nonverbal behavior can substitute for verbal messages. When the cheerful manager arrives home after work, a pleasant facial expression substitutes for the statement, "I've had an exceptional day." With practice, family, friends, and coworkers learn to identify a wide range of these substitute nonverbal displays - all the way from "It's been a great day!" to "I'm miserable!" Our associates do not need to ask for verbal confirmation of their perceptions.

4. Complementing.

Nonverbal behavior can modify, or elaborate on verbal messages. You might, for example, say that you aren't sure about attending a meeting and let your nonverbal behaviors elaborate the statement into a definite "no." A supervisor may tell an employee that work is slow, but the supervisor's grim expression more clearly sends the message that things are at a standstill. An employee may reflect an attitude of embarrassment when talking to his or her manager about why a task was completed late. Further, nonverbal behavior may reflect changes in the relationship between the employee and the manager. When an employee's slow, quiet verbalizations and relaxed posture change - when posture stiffens and the emotional level of the statements increases - this may signal changes in their relationship. Complementary functions of nonverbal communication serve to signal one's attitudes and intentions toward another person.

5. Accenting.

Nonverbal behavior accents aspects of our verbal messages much like underlining or italicizing written words. Movements of the head and hands are frequently used to accent our verbal message. A supervisor may speak to an employee about finishing a piece of work with some clearly nonverbal emphases, such as raising eyebrows, speaking more slowly, and gesturing firmly. When counseling an employee about being tardy, a manager may accent a particular phrase with a frown. In some instances, one set of nonverbal cues can accent other nonverbal cues. For example, emotions are primarily exhibited by facial expressions, but the body carries the most accurate indicators regarding the level of intensity.

6. Relating and Regulating.

Nonverbal signals regulate the flow of communication between people. This is called the relational function. A nod, eye movement, or shift in position may signal the other person to continue to speak or to stop speaking because you want to say something. If you are conversing with someone and you have another appointment, you may signal nonverbally by moving your eyes or shifting from leg to leg or smiling tensely that the other person should stop speaking and end the conversation. If you want the other person to continue talking, you may nod your head and say, "Uh huh," or look at the other intently and attentively. In these ways you control who talks, how long, how often, and about what. Speakers rely on this feedback to figure out how their messages are being received - and whether the other person is even paying attention.

As a supervisor or manager, it is important to do more than simply listen to what your employees say. "Read between the lines" by observing your employees' nonverbal behavior. Misunderstandings, distortions, and nonfidelity in communication can result from failing to recognize or respond to the nonverbal signals that accompany what employees say. It is a mistake to ignore nonverbal behavior.

THE EFFECTS OF PHYSICAL APPEARANCE AND DRESS ON COMMUNICATION

> By a man's finger-nails, by his coat-sleeve, by his boots, by his trouser-knees, by the callosities of his forefinger and thumb, by his expression, by his shirt-cuffs - by each of these things a man's calling is plainly revealed. That all united should fail to enlighten the competent inquirer in any case is almost inconceivable. - Sherlock Holmes

The exact role of appearance and dress in the total system of nonverbal communication is still unknown. We do know, however, that appearance and dress are part of the nonverbal stimuli that influence interpersonal responses - and under some conditions they are the primary determiners of such responses. The way you dress and your physical appearance influence your interactions with others. They also have some bearing on whether you can persuade others. Therefore, it is important to dress professionally and to maintain a neat physical appearance.

THE EFFECTS OF THE FACE AND EYES ON COMMUNICATION

The face is rich in communicative potential. It is the primary transmitter for information about our emotional state; it reflects interpersonal attitudes; it provides nonverbal feedback on the comments of others. Some say it is the primary source of information next to speech. For these reasons, and because of its visibility, we pay a great deal of attention to the messages we receive from the faces of others.

Throughout history, man has been preoccupied with the eye and its effects on human behavior. Do you recall the last time you used one of these phrases: "She could look right through you"; "It was an icy stare"; "He's got shifty eyes"; "She's all eyes"; "Did you see the gleam in his eye?"; "We're seeing eye to eye now"; "He looked like the original Evil Eye"; "His eyes shot daggers across the room"; "She could kill with a glance"?

The key point to remember is that the face and eyes are a source of a great deal of information on the emotional states of your employees. Employees don't always verbally express what they are saying. But you can often "read" how they are feeling if you watch the nonverbal signals expressed through the face and eyes.

VISUAL AIDS

Visual aids are another way that we communicate nonverbally. They can be very effective when they accompany a presentation. Visual aids emphasize your main points and assist the audience's memory. Research shows that the combination of the spoken word with an accompanying graphic or visual effectively increases an audience's retention rate. Moreover, visual aids such as charts, graphs, diagrams, and tables also clarify difficult concepts, graphically compare data, keep the speaker on track, combat listener confusion or boredom, and condense the main points of the presentation.

A key precept to remember is: Don't use visual aids simply because everyone else does. Visual aids should be used to supplement - not to replace the content of your presentation. Overusing or misusing visual aids causes difficulties:

1. Diverts the audience's attention from what you're saying.

2. Confuses the audience by misrepresenting data.

3. Overwhelms the audience with irrelevant information.

To determine the usefulness of a visual aid, ask these three questions:

1. Does it help the audience remember the point?

2. Does it clarify significant matters?

3. Does it impress?

A shoddy graphic can mar the professionalism of your presentation just as a well-incorporated graphic can impress the audience. Graphics and visual aids should be clear and uncluttered. Restrict the amount of information portrayed in each graphic. It is important to integrate the text of your presentation and its accompanying graphics smoothly.

Decide which elements of your presentation need to be represented visually or graphically, then decide how to present them to your audience. If you are uncertain how to proceed, advice is available from WID's Presentations Support staff.

Mistakes in visual aids are common. Here are some guidelines to help you use them effectively.

1. When you include graphs in your presentation:

   - Limit pie charts to seven wedges and place labels outside the pie.
   - Use no more than two or three lines on a line graph.
   - Limit bar graphs to seven bars and avoid crowding.
   - Remember that the audience will need more time to analyze even a simple graph, so leave those slides on the screen a little longer.
   - Make sure the audience can read and understand a slide with a graph in 20 seconds or less.

2. Use bullets that contain a complete thought, but not necessarily a complete sentence.

3. Bullets should be confined to one line if possible.

4. Use bullets
   - o subbullets
     - o minorpoints

5. If you go below minorpoints, you are including too much detail.

   Detailed information should be conveyed orally rather than on your visual aids.

6. Never read from the overhead screen unless visual information must be emphasized.

7. Do not use complex charts/graphs/drawings.

   Resist the temptation to use technical drawings and prints as visual aids; they typically include things unrelated to the topic. Instead, develop simplified drawings of the system or component you are focusing on. It will be easier for your audience to understand.

Visual aids are a valuable tool you can use to communicate nonverbally. The keys to using visual aids effectively are to (1) keep them simple, (2) don't overuse them, and (3) integrate them (blend them in smoothly with the rest of your presentation).

SUMMARY

As we have seen, nonverbal communication is a large part of the communication process. It is not possible to be an effective communicator if you are unaware of or ignore nonverbal behavior. Using the information contained in this module will assist you in becoming proficient in communicating verbally and nonverbally.

References: Nonverbal Communication in Human Interaction by M. Knapp, 1972
Silent Messages by A. Mehrabian, 1971
Notes on Effectively Using Visual Aids by Judy Seal, Waste Isolation Division, 1991
Graphic Advice for Your Slides by D. Altvater, Communication Briefings, June 1991

F. CONDUCT OF COMMUNICATIONS

Enabling Objectives

Upon completion of this section, the trainee will be able to perform the following:

1. Identify effective communication practices.
2. Given an employee-manager scenario, evaluate the manager's effectiveness in conducting communications.

We have discussed many communication methods and techniques so far in this module. In this section, we focus on the conduct of communications. We will cover practices that will help you to become a more effective communicator.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION PRACTICES

1. Adopt a two-way philosophy of communication.

   You need to give your employees feedback, but you must be willing to receive feedback from them, too. Some of this feedback may be negative. This can be hard to take. Here are some guidelines to help you handle negative feedback or criticism:

   - Separate yourself from the criticism. You are not your mistakes.
   - It's all right to dislike your behavior and still like yourself.
   - Think about modifying and improving your behavior, not labeling or judging yourself.
   - Deal with the issue, not your personality or irrelevant personal matters.
   - Hold the belief that <u>you</u>, not others, are responsible for your behavior and feelings.

2. Don't overcommunicate.

   Employees don't need to hear negative information that they can't do anything about. This will adversely affect employee morale.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION PRACTICES (Continued)

3. Be considerate in your conduct of communication.

   Return telephone calls and respond to letters.

4. Communicate often.

   Don't be a "ghost" to your employees. Hold workplace meetings to discuss successes, problems, and issues.

5. Communicate specifically.

   Many errors could be avoided if managers and supervisors would be explicit about what they want and when they want it.

6. Close the loop; make sure your listener understood what you meant.

   Remember this basic guideline: It is the sender's responsibility to see that the receiver has gotten the message.

7. Don't "dump and run."

   This is when you purposely limit your communication to a one-way flow. An example is sending a memo to another department informing them that you have committed them to a task and deadline. This is "dumping and running" because you did not seek their feedback before you "dumped" the commitment on them and "ran off." This type of one-way communication behavior angers the "dumpees". It is a form of baton-passing that can delay task accomplishment.

8. Don't sugar-coat your communications.

   Keep your communications honest. Performance reviews are an arena where sugar-coating often takes place. If an employee is an average performer, give them an average rating. A misuse of the performance management system will come back to haunt you when it is time to plan merit increases.

To summarize, communicate with others as you would prefer them to communicate with you. This will help prevent mistakes and build positive working relationships with others. In effect, it will help you be a better supervisor or manager.

CRITICAL INCIDENT
INEFFECTIVE PERFORMANCE

Occurrence: A WID manager was infamous for his poor communication practices. He rarely returned phone calls and often missed appointments employees had made with him. One employee left three messages pleading for a phone call, but to no avail; the manager never called. Employees nicknamed the manager, "the Ghost."

Impact: The manager's employees felt a distinct lack of support from this manager. As a result, they had little affinity for him. The manager's communication practices caused him to be perceived as unresponsive and discourteous. Other managers felt less inclined to cooperate with this individual.

Lessons learned: (1) Communicating with other employees is not an option; it is part of your job. (2) Your communication practices will impact the type of cooperation and support you receive from others. (3) Employees need and expect to communicate frequently with their manager.

References: Managing Assertively: How to Improve Your People Skills
by M. Burley-Allen, 1983
We're Making Sure, Westinghouse

PRACTICE TEST

1. Messages are sometimes garbled during communication transactions. The responsibility for ensuring that messages are transmitted accurately lies with the

   a. receiver and the sender.

   b. sender only.

   c. receiver only.

   (F.1)

2. A manager was busy responding to a number of audit findings. Time was short, so the manager transferred one of the audit findings to another section using a memorandum. The memorandum explained that the other department now had ownership for responding to the finding. Was this a GOOD practice? Why?

   a. YES - the manager was effectively using one-way communication

   b. YES - the manager had no other choice given the shortage of time

   c. NO - managers should stay out of ownership issues

   d. NO - the manager was using one-way communication to pass off work

   (F.2)

3. A supervisor wanted to gather employees' responses to a proposal he was evaluating. The manager decided to use a memo which described the proposal and said "please call me with your opinion about this proposal." Was this a GOOD practice? Why?

   a. YES - the manager was more likely to get a response from employees through his participative practices

   b. YES - memos are the most effective way to convey information to employees

   c. NO - the manager should have chosen the bulletin board as the method of communication

   d. NO - a face-to-face meeting would be the best method of communication

   (B.5)

4. A manager was a strong believer in communicating with employees and keeping them informed. The manager had access to information that the customer was considering cancelling a project that the manager's employees were working on. The manager informed his employees of the possible cancellation, and told the employees to, "keep your chins up and continue to work hard to finish the project." Was this a GOOD practice? Why?

   a. YES - supervisors and managers should keep employees informed about events that could affect them

   b. YES - employees were now more likely to work hard to finish the project before it was cancelled

   c. NO - the manager should have told employees to gather more "inside information" about the possible cancellation

   d. NO - this information was likely to demotivate employees because there was nothing they could do about it

   (F.2)

5. A supervisor was a firm believer in the effectiveness of videos, using them whenever he provided informal training to his employees. Was this a GOOD practice? Why?

   a. YES - videos represent the state of the art in communication methods

   b. YES - it is best to find one efficient and reliable method of communication and then to stick with it

   c. NO - it is best to choose the method of communication that fits each individual situation

   d. NO - the supervisor should have left training to the professional instructors in the Technical Training Section

   (B.5)

6. A manager always wrote memos and letters so that the purpose of the document was expressed in the first paragraph. Was this a GOOD practice? Why?

   a. YES - it is usually best to let your readers know your purpose early

   b. YES - your statement of purpose is required to be the first sentence of your document

   c. NO - it is best to save your purpose for the last paragraph of your document to give it extra emphasis

   d. NO - when you give your purpose early, many recipients won't bother reading the rest of the document

   (C.2)

7. A supervisor was preparing a presentation on a highly technical topic. The audience was largely unfamiliar with the topic, and was unlikely to be exposed to it again. The supervisor wished to convey as much information as possible to the audience, so he included as many facts about the topic as he could in his presentation. Was this a GOOD practice? Why?

   a. YES - effective presentations are content-oriented

   b. YES - audiences can listen to and retain a large amount of information in a short period of time provided all of the facts are presented

   c. NO - presenters should stick with what is relevant and crucial in presentations

   (D.14)

8. A manager was a "stickler" about always planning for meetings and sticking to her agenda. Was this a GOOD practice? Why?

   a. YES - planning for and controlling meetings are to keys to success

   b. NO - meetings should be unstructured to encourage creative thinking

   c. NO - agendas are inhibitors to effective communication

   (D.14)

9. A supervisor was careful to document his employees' performance problems. Rather than constantly nag employees about their problems, the supervisor waited to discuss problems during quarterly objective review meetings. Was this a GOOD practice? Why?

   a. YES - the primary purpose of objective review meetings is to discuss problems that have occurred during the review period

   b. YES - it is best to allow employees to pass through the "grieving" period that typically follows mistakes before coaching or counseling

   c. NO - the supervisor should have waited until the final performance review session to discuss shortcomings

   d. NO - the supervisor was not providing timely feedback

   (D.14)

10. An employee came to her manager with a work problem. The manager let the employee talk at length about the problem, interjecting observations only occasionally. At the end of the meeting, the employee left, set on solving the problem. Did the manager conduct effective communications during this meeting? Why?

   a. YES - the manager practiced effective listening and got the employee to work on her own problem

   b. NO - the manager violated the cardinal rule of communication; it is the manager's responsibility to control the meeting by doing most of the communicating

   c. NO - the manager did not provide enough feedback

   d. NO - the manager should have tried to solve the problem at the meeting

   (D.6)

ANSWERS AND FEEDBACK FOR PRACTICE TEST

1. b. sender only.

2. d. NO - the manager was using one-way communication to pass off work

3. d. NO - a face-to-face meeting would be the best method of communication

4. d. NO - this information was likely to demotivate employees because there was nothing they could do about it

5. c. NO - it is best to choose the method of communication that fits each individual situation

6. a. YES - it is usually best to let your readers know your purpose early

7. c. NO - presenters should stick with what is relevant and crucial in presentations

8. a. YES - planning for and controlling meetings are to keys to success

9. d. NO - the supervisor was not providing timely feedback

10. a. YES - the manager practiced effective listening and got the employee to work on her own problem

If you scored 80% or higher on the practice test, you are ready to take the module examination; please see the HRD Training Coordinator.

If you scored less than 80% on the practice test, please re-read the module and take the practice test again. If you still have questions, contact the HRD Training Coordinator.